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AUTHOR Goolsby, Thomas M., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

During the past twenty years, the Law School Admission Test and seven other such tests have been used variously for selection, placement, and advisement of students seeking advanced degrees. The use of a single test for decision making has been proven inadequate, and in fact the test publishers caution against this practice. The use of test results with minority groups has been questioned insistently, and lacks valid evidence for fair use. Although the courts have been hearing litigation cases involving university policies for only ten years, there is an increasing tendency to examine academic decision with the prospects of accelerated review. This seems to be the results of several forces which involve the present trend to re-evaluate the role of higher education, civil rights protection, and student rights. This trend may reverse the prevailing majority position of universities in the record of court decisions. Individuals applying to professional programs should be able to submit any evidence which seems appropriate to them for consideration by the university, which in turn should require its own evidence. An analysis of all data should be made and included in a report for the faculty directly concerned. Several other procedures for the student's benefit should be undertaken. It has been estimated that such procedures could be implemented efficiently and at reasonable cost. (NE)

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THE USE OF TESTS FOR SELECTION AND OTHER PURPOSES IN THE PROFESSIONS*

Thomas M. Goolsby, Jr.

University of Georgia

Since World War II and especially during the past twenty years, tests such as the Law School Admission Test have been used in the process of a student seeking an advanced degree. Other such tests are:

1. Miller Analogies Test
2. National Teacher Examinations
3. Graduate School Foreign Language Tests
4. Graduate Record Examinations
5. Dental Aptitude Test
6. Medical College Admission Test
7. Veterinary Aptitude Test

The tests alluded to above have been variously used for selection, placement, and/or advisement. With a selection objective, maximum validity is necessary for only one category of training. Decisions about who should study in professional schools must be made! The policy of "open" admissions, at least for some time to come, has gone by the board. A number of professional schools do not consider themselves as having a "selective" policy, but rather a "competitive" one (especially with regard to admissions). "By this they mean that they do not have strict and explicit admissions requirements that apply equally to all applicants. They pick and choose among those who meet their minimum requirements and perhaps occasionally choose someone who does not even meet those minimums" (Hills, 1971a).

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With a placement objective, one is concerned with differential validity. A set of tasks (a test) with varying degrees of validity is necessary for subcategories of future performances with given subgroups of subjects. Each test given should show validity for some but not all future performances.

With an advisement objective, one is concerned with many types of information and varying degrees of validity for future performance.

Ideally for education in the professions a test(s) should be used for selection, placement and advisement.

"Correlations between placement test scores and criteria such as grades are more likely to be around .5 than any number greater than that, or often they will not be that high (see, for instance, Goolsby, 1966b)" (Hills, 1971). Even though this summary statement uses the word placement, the situation is equally true for selection and advisement. When one considers single predictors and single criteria, correlations are more likely to be around .40. The reader is reminded that these magnitudes of correlation account for from 16 to 25 percent of total variance. These magnitudes of relationships are unacceptable as adequate validity, especially for the selection objective and even for the placement objective. In certain instances, there is even question about advisement.

Test publishers such as Educational Testing Service, Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, Houghton-Mifflin, Science Research Associates and other publishers caution about the use of a single test for decision making. Thus, they can be said to have acted with responsibility to the consuming public. The advice of the publisher is so many times not accepted and, consequently, a

good and useful test is likely to be misused.

What may seem to many to be a slight digression at this point is nonetheless critical for future graduate education and the society at large. "It has become abundantly clear throughout the history of ability testing that some groups do less well on tests than others. Children from remote rural areas, children from economically and culturally deprived homes, and children of ethnic minorities -- the Negro, the Mexican-American, the Indian -- have typically performed less well than the general American population on which test norms have been based. The use of test results with these groups has been questioned more and more insistently in recent years as court decisions and legislation have focused attention on civil rights and the demands of minority groups" (Thorndike, 1971). Also, the use of tests, especially as predictors, with minority groups lacks adequate validity evidence for fair use. (The 1968 evidence of Kirkpatrick, et al. is beginning to be supplemented.)

It has been only in the past ten years or so that the courts have been willing to hear litigation cases involving college and university's policies and procedures concerning admission and graduation requirements, grading practices, and others.

During the past few years the courts have exhibited an increasing tendency to review academic decisions about students with the prospects of accelerated review. These reviews appear to be the result of several forces:

1. increased sophistication and curiosity of students
2. the decline of the in loco parentis doctrine

3. Higher education being regarded as both a social necessity and as an individual right
4. The expansion of civil rights protection by public authority
5. The developing notion that "state universities are simply another agency of the state government to be policed, regulated, and whipped into a bureaucratic mold" (Enarson, 1973).
6. the new age of majority in which students are adults rather than minors (Young, 1973).

In a survey of cases over the past decade dealing primarily with academic issues, the majority of final decisions were in favor of the institutions involved (Learning Research Center, The University of Tennessee at Knoxville, 1973). If the present trend continues, however, this majority position of institutions of higher learning cannot prevail for very many years.

Professional schools clearly need to adopt admissions procedures which would maximize the acceptance of the "most talented" students. These procedures can very effectively and efficiently utilize multiple variables instead of the usual single criterion.

Individuals seeking admission to professional programs should be allowed to submit whatever evidence seems appropriate to them for consideration by a given institution of higher learning. In addition, the institution should require certain kinds of evidence from those seeking admission, including measures like the ones alluded to in the beginning of the paper (GRE, NTE, LSAT, MAT, & etc.). An analysis and review of

such data should be made and a report forwarded to the faculty most directly concerned. Discrepancies in analyses or judgment should be reconsidered. The student should be appropriately counseled. Most administrators would contend that such a procedure would be too costly to effectuate. The matter of fact is that the procedure has not been tried. It is estimated that with a little practice a well qualified person in screening procedures could process approximately 150 applicants in a single working month.

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